

Minutes of the **County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service Audit and Finance Committee meeting** held at Fire HQ on **23 January 2025 at 10:00hours**.

<b>Present:</b>	Cllr R Bell (Chair)
<b>Durham County Council:</b>	Cllr Lesley Mavin Cllr Alison Batey
<b>Darlington Borough Council:</b>	-
<b>Independent Person:</b>	Alan Foster
<b>Officers:</b>	Tony Hope Keith Lazzari
<b>Internal Audit:</b>	Nicola Cooke
<b>External Audit (Mazars):</b>	Smriti Sood/James Collins
<b>Secretariat</b>	Natasha McLoughlin

## **Part A**

It was noted that the meeting would not be quorate however it was agreed that the meeting would go ahead and Cllr Anderson would be contacted after the meeting for agreement on the recommendations.

### **1 Apologies**

Apologies were noted from Cllrs A Anderson and B Kellett.

### **2 Minutes of the Previous Meetings**

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 27 November 2024 were agreed as a true record.

### **3 Audit Strategy Memorandum Year Ended 31 March 2024**

S Sood gave an update on the planned work to be carried out by External Audit for 2023/24 which covered audit option, fraud, internal control and value for money.

Cllr Bell queried meeting the end of January deadline. J Collins confirmed at this stage they were confident deadlines would be met.

The report was noted.

### **4 Issue of Audit Certificate on the 2023/23 Statement of Accounts**

C Collins reported that the signed audit certificate for 2022/23 had been issued and reminded the meeting of the reasons for the lateness.

The report was noted.

**5 Forecast of Outturn for 2024/2025 to 31 December 2024**

T Hope presented the report which provided an indication of the Service's forecast revenue and capital outturn position at Quarter 3. Based upon expenditure and income to 31 December 2024, the forecast revenue outturn position to the 31 March 2025 is an underspend of £0.816M (2.30%).

A Foster asked for clarification of borrowing versus reserves. K Lazzari explained that in relation to the control project the grant had been put into reserves and was now being drawn down as the service had demonstrated that the system requirements had been met.

The layout of Appendix 2 was discussed. T Hope agreed to amend the table to include capital expenditure on the fire control project.

The report was noted.

**6 Short Term-Investments and Long-Term Borrowing – Quarter 3**

T Hope presented the short-term investments and long-term borrowing for Quarter 3 report and members noted the position at 31 December 2024.

Discussion followed on the new HQ where the estimated cost was £6.5m which would be funded from borrowing due to the cost of the project.

The report was noted.

**7 Revenue and Capital Budgets 2025/26 and Medium Term Financial Plan**

T Hope introduced the report which set out details of the provisional local government finance settlement for 2025/26, asked members to consider the draft revenue and capital budgets and medium-term financial plan and sought members agreement on a firm recommendation on the level of council tax to the meeting of the Fire Authority on 17 February 2025.

A Foster commented the disappointing outcome regarding national insurance contributions following the announcement in the budget. T Hope gave an update from his meeting with the Treasury and the assumptions they were given.

Following a discussion, it was agreed to send a lobbying letter to Government regarding the fire funding formula.

Members **noted** the budget pressures and risks identified as part of the budget setting process and **considered** the proposed council tax increase for 2025/26. Following a vote, it was **agreed** to recommend a 4.23% increase (£5 on a Band D property) to the Fire Authority meeting on 17 February 2025.

**ACTIONS FROM MEETING**

No	Item No	Who	Action	Complete
1	5	TH	To amend appendix to reflect capital expenditure on the fire control projects	ASAP
2	7	TH	To prepare a letter from the committee to send regarding the fire funding formula	ASAP